



Ministry of
Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 08-11-45
Week of March 10, 2008

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL SAFETY WEEK A REMINDER TO TAKE CARE

The statistics put agricultural production as one of the most accident-prone occupations in Canada. Even more regrettable, many of the injuries and incidents that occur are preventable.

That's why the annual Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) provides such an important reminder for farm families to take that extra bit of caution that can prevent hardship – or even worse, tragedy.

This year, CASW will take place March 12 to 18. It will be the start of a year-long campaign aimed at reducing some of the most prevalent types of farm-related injuries.

"The theme of the 2008 campaign is called, 'Manage more than just your back,'" said Patty Williams, the Chair of the Saskatchewan Alliance for Safety and Health in Agriculture, one of the organizations active in the initiative.

"That's looking at specific things we can do as producers to reduce sprains, strains and falls – taking care of our back physically – but also taking a look around at your whole farming operation, and weaving that safety message into what you do on a daily basis. So it's encouraging a whole culture of safety," she noted.

Sprains and strains are Canada's leading types of farm-related injuries, according to Kendra Ulmer, a registered nurse and team leader with the Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan.

"Overextension is the leading cause, followed by livestock handling, particularly beef, followed by machine-related overexertion common to field crop farms and market gardens, and then falls," Ulmer stated.

"These four types of incidents account for 84 per cent of all the strains and sprains sustained in agricultural work."

CASW is usually launched in an eastern and a western Canadian location every year. This year's western launch will take place on March 13 at the 2008 annual convention of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) in Regina.

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"By having the launch here in Saskatchewan, and having it at SARM, we're demonstrating the leadership taken by the various organizations in the province to promote farm safety. The SARM conference is just an excellent venue to do that," Ulmer said.

"It's also a fitting way to help recognize SARM for their 20 years of support for important farm safety initiatives and for the well-being of Saskatchewan's agricultural producers."

The focus for this year's CASW is two-fold. "Part of it is on awareness, to encourage farmers to protect their physical well-being by using proper lifting techniques, good posture and body mechanics that will preserve their health. The other part of it is on education, encouraging farmers and ranchers to take a careful look at the hazards in their workplace, ensure a clutter-free work place and so on," Williams said.

"Our messaging this week is not about what producers are doing, but rather how they're doing it," Ulmer added. "When there are hazards that are predictable, they are also preventable."

More information on the 2008 CASW is available on the websites of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, at www.casa-acsa.ca, and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, at www.cfa-fca.ca.

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Log Number: 08-11-46
Week of March 10, 2008

SASKATOON SCHOOL OF HORTICULTURE OPENS IN MARCH

The Saskatoon School of Horticulture opens its doors in March to students who will train for careers in garden centre management, greenhouses, nurseries, landscape design and parks and recreation.

The private vocational school is located in McKay Career College, and offers one- and two-year programs. The curricula for the certificate and diploma programs have been approved and accredited by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

In addition, the Saskatoon School of Horticulture offers community-based courses for casual learners, such as the Prairie Master Gardener program. These credits can be later applied to a diploma or certificate program.

The school's creation responds to industry growth within Saskatchewan. "The gardening community and the horticulture industry here have grown an amazing amount in the past 10 or 15 years," according to instructor Patricia Hanbidge. "Unfortunately, the education hasn't quite kept abreast of what the needs are, so the industry is crying for people with both experience and knowledge."

Despite her experience in this growing field, Hanbidge was surprised by local demand. "With our first wave of advertising, we discovered there was a huge number of people who were interested in some floral design courses," she said. "They could design flowers for their home, for their wedding, to maybe work in the floral industry and so on. So we just launched a whole series of floral design courses that are starting in March, as well."

With its March opening, over 100 people will receive training in either the certificate or diploma programs, or the community-based courses.

The school employs five people, and will grow with demand. "We have been very cognizant of the need to supply high quality education, but with a practical side to it, as well," Hanbidge said. "It's quite amazing the level of interest we have had from potential employers to the student base."

Hanbidge authored the curriculum for the Saskatoon School of Horticulture for both the certificate and diploma programs, and will serve as an instructor at the school.

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With over 25 years of experience as a horticulturist, she received her initial training from the University of Saskatchewan, and supplemented her education with courses in Ontario and Europe. Hanbidge has co-ordinated the Master Gardener program for the University of Saskatchewan, and has been involved in a number of community programs. She is also the author of seven books.

In designing the curriculum, Hanbidge focused on the needs of the Great Plains. "I spent a lot of time researching what programs were available, and quite often, I found that the courses really weren't what we needed in the industry on the prairies," she said. As a result, she has worked to balance a high quality education with industry goals, such as profitability.

Instruction lasts for 25 hours per week for 38 weeks. This will include labs, field trips and classroom instruction. However, the programs are designed to be flexible, recognizing that not all students are in a position to leave employment for full-time study. The curriculum is therefore designed in modules that can be taken one at a time.

The modules will cover topics such as botany, soil sciences, entomology and propagation. Hanbidge says that year one provides a broad foundation of knowledge, but in year two, students take courses that are much more in-depth, and can choose to study in the focus area of their choice. Specializations might include greenhouse production, landscape design, grass and golf-course management, and other areas of interest.

In each year, students are encouraged to take a practicum. "Not only does it give them real-life experience, but it quite often paves the way to a job," Hanbidge noted.

The employers of horticulture specialists vary, though many students have already expressed an interest in entrepreneurship. Some already have an agricultural base and are looking to supplement their farm income or completely revamp their current operations. Others will work in greenhouses, where there is high demand for trained upper-level managers. Municipalities will also employ graduates, as they look to improve the sustainability and beautification of their community.

The opening of the Saskatoon School of Horticulture will enable students in the field to stay in Saskatchewan. Until now, top horticulture education programs have been offered in Guelph, Ontario and Olds, Alberta.

Once leaving Saskatchewan for training, students often chose to stay in the cities and provinces where they studied. Hanbidge hopes that this new school will facilitate the development of horticulture careers within Saskatchewan. With more people trained in horticulture in the province, Hanbidge expects the immediate effect will be local industries filling specialized positions.

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A ripple effect will be that private businesses will be able to better serve the public, which demands different plants and broad knowledge. In the long run, the growing number of trained horticulturists will help to diversify the prairie landscape.

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Log Number: 08-11-47
Week of March 10, 2008

CALF EAR MUFFS A HIT WITH PRODUCERS AND ANIMALS

Although Paris Hilton is leading a growing trend of fashion accessories for pets, the calf ear muffs sewn by Marge Garnier of Redvers add functionality to fun.

The ear muffs fit like a halter, with polar fleece ear covers. Velcro straps make the product easy to attach and remove. They come in a variety of colours, and each set is dual-coloured to help increase the visibility in case they fall off into the straw.

Accommodations can be made to the sizing for different breeds, but generally, the ear pockets are sewn large in case they also need to cover ear tags.

Garnier discovered the idea of calf ear muffs in response to a spell of cold weather. Back in the late 1980s, the Garniers showed their purebred cattle of various breeds. When a bull calf was born in minus 30 degree weather, his ears froze, dried and broke off, thus ruining his future at cattle shows.

Frozen ears affect the value of both purebred and commercial calves, according to Garnier. "If a purebred calf has frozen ears, nobody wants to buy it. If it's a commercial calf, you sell it and you're going to get 15 or 20 cents a pound less because he has frozen ears," she said.

To prevent similar freezing incidents in the future, Garnier turned to her sewing machine.

The first sets of ear muffs required a bit of experimentation. "Just like baking, I don't follow a recipe and I don't follow a pattern. I got out a measuring tape and made some adjustments that seemed to work," she stated.

Not only was Garnier sewing without the help of a pattern – ear muffs were not even an innovation she had seen before on a calf. "It was just a problem that I thought I could do something to fix. As far as I know, there had been nothing like this before."

After making enough ear muffs for the Garniers' cattle, she made some for friends. The idea spread significantly in the fall of 1993, when her creations received exposure in a Minnesota publication on farming innovations.

Her husband phoned while she was working at Agribition with news that there were interested buyers for her product. At this moment, Garnier realized the entrepreneurial potential of her idea.

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"I thought, 'If I could make next to 100 by Christmas, wouldn't that be nice extra money?'" she noted.

Shortly after Christmas, Garnier was producing 100 ear muffs per day. All told, she estimates she has sold more than 30,000 sets across North America.

Word of Garnier's business venture spread with the help of free publicity. She received many radio interview requests, and appeared on CBC Television's *On the Road Again*, hosted by Wayne Rostad.

As calf ear muffs gained popularity among the cattle owners, they also achieved general acceptance among the cattle. Most cows do not seem to mind their calves wearing ear warmers, although the odd animal remains determined to remove them from the calf's head.

To increase the likelihood of the cow's acceptance, Garnier offers two pieces of advice. "We find that if we rub them on the calf before we put them on, then the ear muffs smell the same as the calf," she noted.

It also helps to apply the ear muffs as soon as possible after birth. In fact, when Garnier is present for her own calves' births, she dries the ears with the ear muffs.

Garnier's calf ear muffs enhance calves' safety and preserve their sale value. They are available for purchase through mail-order and select retailers, including Federated Co-op.

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Log Number: 08-11-48
Week of March 10, 2008

LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS LEARN TO MINIMIZE ANIMAL STRESS

Approximately 200 livestock producers will gather in North Battleford on March 18 and Yorkton on March 20 to learn stockmanship skills at the Low Stress Handling Workshop, hosted by the Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan (FACS).

Richard McConnell from Polk County, Missouri will instruct the seminar using the Bud Williams methodology. He will be assisted by Williams' daughter, Tina.

Stockmanship takes a step away from the traditional use of fear and force to move animals. Instead, it involves minimizing the stress created for both the livestock and the handlers. Some of the most common stressors are an everyday part of regular livestock operations – shipping, adjustment to new surroundings, treating and sorting.

According to McConnell, the benefits of stockmanship to the animals include better gains, less shrinkage during shipping and improved performance of vaccines and medications. These advantages stem from the reduction of stress when working with the livestock.

To an increasing degree, the public is also taking note of the quality of life of farm animals. "Consumers are interested to know how livestock is raised and how it's cared for," said Adele Buettner, the Executive Director of FACS. "We're focused on providing the most responsibly produced livestock that we can, and our industry is supporting that effort."

As a result of smoother operations, handlers will gain efficiency and an improved frame of mind.

McConnell says the Bud Williams method of stockmanship holds many advantages. "Rather than forcing the animals to do what we want, we let the animals do what we want," he noted.

The full-day workshop begins with a discussion of the value of stockmanship. McConnell then explains the animals' natural instincts and the relationship between predators and prey. This relationship has implications for the handlers' movement, positioning within the workspace and attitude toward the animals. Participants receive practical advice related to training the herd, sorting the animals and weaning.

Because of their popularity, this will be McConnell's third trip to Saskatchewan to offer the training sessions. Previous editions have been offered in Saskatoon, Regina and Swift Current.

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“Participants are surprised by the relative ease of becoming a better stockman, which is really caused by adjustments to the handler’s attitude,” he stated. Moreover, producers do not need to radically alter their operations in order to enjoy the benefits of improved stockmanship.

McConnell holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture Education from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He received his Masters’ degree in 1983. He taught Vocational Agriculture in Odessa, Missouri for 13 years before starting his own cow-calf and stocker operation. He adopted the Bud Williams methodology into his operations in 2002.

The Low Stress Handling Workshop will be held at the Tropical Inn in North Battleford on March 18, and the Best Western Parkland Inn in Yorkton on March 20.

Participants can pre-register for either session by completing the registration form available on the FACS website, www.facs.sk.ca, or by calling (306) 249-3227. The cost to attend is \$225 per person.

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Log Number: 08-11-49
Week of March 10, 2008

VIDEO SURVEILLANCE MAKING LIFE EASIER AT CALVING SEASON

When Garry Boe implemented a video surveillance system at his Triple M Ranch in 1996, he was a pioneer in adopting the technology for agricultural use.

Today, as he scales back his operation in preparation for retirement, he continues to benefit from the way video surveillance has simplified his workload and increased his ability to monitor the safety of his cattle.

Triple M Ranch raises purebred Gelbviehs in the Saskatoon area. Boe owns a handful of top-market bulls and heifers, and expects to calf 25 to 30 animals this season.

Winter is the season when Boe appreciates his video surveillance system the most. Upon noticing an animal beginning labour, he moves it into the barn. From there, he monitors progress from the warmth of his home without disturbing the cow.

Boe notes that the potential changes in the temperament and behaviour of cows around labour and delivery can threaten the calf. "I figure the less you can disturb the animal, the easier it is on everybody," he said.

If Boe is unable to monitor the delivery because he has been called away from the ranch, he inserts a videotape, which he reviews later in fast-forward mode to ensure that the cow is properly mothering the calf.

In one instance, Boe turned the cow-calf pair into the main pen, where they immediately went into the shelter. In the middle of the night, he awoke to the sound of the calf calling. The cow had brought the calf with her to the feeder, but he could see that she had returned to the shelter, leaving the calf in an emerging blizzard. He went out to bring the calf to the barn to warm up, potentially saving the young animal's life.

According to Boe, video surveillance has improved the survival rate of his calves. In the past 10 years, he has only lost two calves. One was a twin, the other died in a complicated delivery assisted by a veterinarian.

Outside of calving season, he also finds video surveillance useful for heat detection in cows – critical for artificial insemination and embryo transfers.

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After receiving expensive quotes from video surveillance companies, Boe decided to buy his own equipment. Between the corral and the barn, the calving area is covered by three cameras, which feed into the monitoring equipment in the tack room where Boe spends the bulk of his time during calving season. He manages the blind spots of the surveillance system through strategic placement of the bedding. The entire straw area is visible on video, and the animals spend little time elsewhere.

Boe estimates that the first camera he bought twelve years ago cost \$320 from a wholesale club. He considers it to be money well spent. "Cost-wise, it's very efficient, because if you can save the life of one calf, you can buy a new system every year," he stated.

Boe believes he has rescued a number of calves from suffocation when the embryonic sac got caught on their heads. "I can't say for certain whether I saved them or not, because the cow may have got the bag off herself – but you don't know that for sure," he said. Monitoring equipment removes that risk.

The idea of video surveillance has caught on among visitors to Triple M Ranch. The technology is transferable to other livestock operations, including sheep.

Boe finds that his system has provided convenience to his one-man operation. During the night, he sets his alarm clocks two hours apart. When they go off, instead of bundling up and going outside to check the pens, he just watches the screens for 20 minutes and returns to sleep. "It just makes life that much simpler when you're all by yourself."

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